The State of Post-Acute Care

Over the course of the last decade, the integration of post-acute care services in America’s skilled nursing and rehabilitation facilities has exclusively altered the long term care community. Without a doubt, the state of post-acute care in nursing facilities is evolving as facilities continue to treat more short-stay patients and provide intensive medical care for patients requiring a greater variety of complex care services.

Specialized Services for Accelerated Rehabilitation

Today, facilities nationwide are offering a specialized set of services specifically designed to treat, rehabilitate and discharge patients in a short time period. The role of facilities, as post-acute care providers, is to improve patients’ functionality so that they can return home and remain active in their communities.

Unlike nursing homes of the past that served primarily as long term care settings, the 21st century nursing home provides patients with a myriad of services including medical, rehabilitative and therapeutic care. In previous years, patients would have to remain in the hospital following life-saving surgery, medical complications or a serious accident. Today, patients are turning to free-standing nursing and rehabilitation facilities to provide the multifaceted post-acute care they require.

Nursing Homes: the Single Largest Provider of Post-Acute Care

When it comes to this specialized care, the numbers say it all. Recent data indicates that more than 50 percent of Medicare beneficiaries in need of post-acute care following a hospital stay are discharged to a skilled nursing facility, making nursing homes the largest single provider of post-acute care in America. Nursing homes are also treating and discharging patients at a higher rate today than ever before with 39 percent of Medicare patients returning home within 100 days of admission, a percentage that has increased annually since 2003.

Treating More Medicare Patients

Further evidence that facilities are serving a growing number of post-acute patients can be seen through recent trends in payers. Since 2002, the percentage of facilities treating more than 20 percent of Medicare patients daily has increased by two fold. As the treatment of Medicare beneficiaries increases, so does the delivery of post-acute care.

The Future of Care

Although many facilities have taken giant leaps to transform yesterday’s “nursing home” model to meet the post-acute care needs of today’s patient, the way care quality is measured has not kept pace. The manner in which facility performance is evaluated fails to take into account our diversification of care services and the many patient populations we serve.
In the years ahead, our role in the delivery of post-acute care will continue to evolve, and likely expand. Trends suggest that we will admit more and more patients following a hospital visit; provide them with specialized care; and send them home – and we are prepared to do so.